

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany – 22 January 2017

## Matthew 4:12-23

Last Sunday we heard John's version of how Andrew and Simon Peter were called to follow Jesus as his first disciples and now here we are this week, hearing Matthew's version. They are similar, yet they have their differences. In John's gospel, it is the disciples of John the Baptist who get the ball rolling for Andrew and Peter. In Matthew's it is Jesus himself. We move from the generic invitation to "come and see" to Jesus' more specific words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." A shift has been made from the general to the individual. Jesus' invitation is not just a gentle invitation to try something new but a very specific and responsibility-filled invitation to change your life as you help change others. There is a big difference there and that difference is meant for each of us to consider and act on.

When you first start coming to church (and by that, I mean not when you start showing up physically in a pew on Sunday but rather when you first start realizing that you 'need' to be at church, your spirit is being fed and you begin to acknowledge God in your life outside the church building) you are making that shift in mindset, attitude and faith-deepening that is evident in these two different Gospel invitations.

When your church-discipline is just beginning to grow and it is still something that you do for "some reason", you are responding to that invitation to "come and see". Someone or something moved you to check out this whole "God thing" and you responded to that invitation. Your journey was begun.

But then there comes that time in your faith life when you realize, maybe very subtly or maybe quite abruptly, that you are more engaged in this relationship with God than you were when you first began. That does not mean that everything about Christianity comes easily or that you believe every single thing the Church shares with you, but it does mean that somewhere deep down inside, the Holy Spirit has begun to grow within you a new heart – a disciple's heart. And with that new growth will come a desire - or at least an awareness - to ask questions, to get involved with the community, to begin helping others more around you. You might even discover that you want to start talking about your faith to others, helping them to understand what, or who!, has helped to change *your* life so much. When this happens, you have begun to re-interpret the invitation you responded to from simply "come and see" to "follow me and I will make you fish for people."

One of our parishioners shared with me an incredible picture book titled "Dear Pope Francis: The Pope Answers Letters from Children Around the World". In this book, young Christians from around the world have sent letters with hand-drawings to Pope Francis and he has written back to them. Juan, a 10-year old boy from Argentina wrote: "Dear Pope Francis, Why did Jesus choose those 12 apostles and not others?" This is the Pope's response:

Great question, dear Juan Pablo!

Why does Jesus choose this person or that one? Look, Jesus doesn't choose a crowd. He chooses each person, one by one. So he chose the first twelve as his apostles. But we - you and I - are also chosen, with a first name and a family name. I have been chosen as Jorge Mario and you as Juan Pablo. We have been chosen to be Jesus' friends and to do something in life.

We are all chosen by the love of Jesus. But each of us is chosen in a personal way - we are not all chosen in a single common way. Jesus' love makes us feel chosen. But if you feel shut out of his love, then you have to face up to it and ask yourself why you feel that way. Jesus never excludes anyone from his heart. ... *Francis*

When you are in that place in your faith life when you are beginning to recognize the truth of Pope Francis' words, that you have been chosen to be Jesus' friend and to do something in life, and as you begin to both intellectually understand and spiritually live in the truth that you are chosen by the love of Jesus, you are answering that invitation to "come and see". What an exciting path to be on! And for those who love you and are praying that you will come to know the love of Jesus deep within your life, this is a beautiful and astounding time to witness ...

But a time will come, sooner or later, when you begin to recognize in your heart that there is something more calling out to you. There will come a time when you begin to hear that invitation change to one of active participation: "follow me, and I will make you fish for people." When that time comes, don't be scared. Rejoice! The truth is that God loves you so very much that He never expects of you that which you are not capable of giving. And all that time when you were sitting in the pew, listening, watching, wondering, after having come to see, will shift in your understanding as a time of preparation and training. You will be ready to follow and fish for people: sharing your faith in ways that help people to come and see and have their lives changed by Jesus' love as well.

There is a myriad of ways that Jesus invites you to follow and serve. Many people get pretty nervous when they think that following Jesus means openly and continuously talking about Jesus Christ to whomever they meet. While there are indeed some people whose gift is this sort of honest and obvious evangelism, you needn't panic that accepting Jesus' love will mean standing on street corners handing out pamphlets or getting up in a pulpit and sharing your story. If that is how Jesus is calling you, then you will know. But the reality is that Jesus calls each person in individual ways - ways that match who God called you to be.

Jesus himself didn't follow a set path of sharing the Good News of God's love. Sure, he turned water into wine, and he walked on water, but he only did those once! Jesus himself showed his love and care in so many varied ways: he sat down and spoke to people - individually, with groups and with crowds; he forgave sins; he healed bodies and minds; he fed people, literally providing them with food; he taught and he played and he prayed ...

When you take on the invitation to follow Jesus and become a fisher of people, you are opening yourself up to and encouraging God to use you in so many very different ways. Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ limits you only where you limit yourself. You might be called to read a Scripture lesson in Church or to administer the bread and wine at Communion. You might bring in food for the Food Bank or volunteer to take the food to the Food Bank. You might join a Bible study group or begin leading one yourself. You might feel called to become a prophetic voice within the community calling the Church out to look beyond what the Church “sees” and assumes God is calling it to today ... helping the Church discern what God is calling of this community next ...

No matter what God is calling you to do, how Jesus is offering you the invitation to follow, there is one last thing you need to keep in mind – one first, last and always thing, you need to keep in mind. And that is the call that each of you have to be a witness of the faith that you hold in your heart.

A 10—year old girl from Russia, named Nastya, wrote to the Pope asking, “This year I made my First Communion. I would like to ask you what I, as a child, can do to increase the number of Christians in my age group ...” The Pope’s response speaks to each of us as much as it speaks to this little Russian girl:

Dear Nastya,

... You really have a wonderful wish: to increase the number of those who love Jesus and who seek him. This is very beautiful. I support you. The best way to fulfill your wish is to pray to Jesus that the number of his followers will increase. And pray for pastors, religious men and women, and for all who proclaim the Gospel. But most of all, it’s up to you! Give your witness as a Christian where you live, with your family, among your friends, and in your city. You have to be a witness of the faith that you hold in your heart. Pray and be a witness to the love of Jesus. *Francis*

You have been invited by Jesus to “come and see” and to “follow him” as he makes you a fisher or people. Wherever you are along your faith journey, always remember Pope Francis’ words: “You have to be a witness of the faith that you hold in your heart. Pray and be a witness to the love of Jesus.” Whether you are just beginning your faith journey or nearing the end of it, what you really need to do is simply to be a witness of the faith you hold in your heart. If you can do this, you will be following and fishing...